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## President's Message

*By Brian Meyerriecks*

My fellow Naturalists,

I highly encourage all of you to attend our Annual Meeting scheduled for November 10, 6:30 PM at the BRNP Annex. We will elect a new slate of officers and Ron Circé will deliver his lecture on Gear for the Naturalist, just in time to get those must-haves on your holiday wish list.

As my term as your President winds down, I want to let you know it has been truly a pleasure and an honor leading and supporting such a wonderful organization. Each of you brings tremendous skills and talent in support of our mission and vision. Your volunteer efforts really make a difference. I am excited about the new officers; they will bring innovative ideas, enthusiasm and a fresh perspective to our organization. So come meet your new leaders, I look forward to seeing you all at the Annual Meeting.

**SAVE THE DATES!**  
**Virginia Outdoors Festival**  
Saturday, October 8

**Nature Stewardship Day**  
Sunday, October 16

**Hometown Habitat Viewing**  
Wednesday, October 19

**VMN Banshee Reeks Chapter  
Annual Meeting**  
Thursday, November 10

**Living Legacy Tree Planting**  
Saturday, November 12  
**Volunteers Needed!**

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## Banshee Reeks – A Treasure!

Banshee Reeks has been designated a Virginia Land Conservation Treasure. The [Treasures](#) program's goal is "to preserve, protect and highlight Virginia's most important ecological, cultural, scenic and recreational assets". A new sign will highlight this honor for visitors.



The new Virginia Treasures sign

## Fall Migration: Hawk-watch sites and monitoring opportunities

By Julie Paul, Naturalist, BRNP

'Tis the time for fall migration! Among the thousands of passerines that embark on their journey south toward warm temperatures and abundant food sources, thousands of raptors can also be seen making their journey to wintering grounds in the southern US, Caribbean Islands and South America. Watch along the mountain ridges and coastal plains as these birds follow the Atlantic Flyway to their southern destinations. This is a great opportunity to see a wide variety of raptors, from smaller sharp-shinned hawks, kestrels and merlins to the great bald eagles, ospreys, red-tailed and broad-winged hawks.

There are a dozen hawk-watch sites scattered throughout the state where you can witness this fascinating natural phenomenon. Our local hawk-watch site is located just miles from Banshee Reeks, at the Route 7/Appalachian Trail crossing at Snickers Gap. Here, at the Snickers Gap parking lot, trained volunteers collect data every day during fall migration by identifying and counting raptors from September through November. If you head to a hawk-watch site, be prepared with binoculars! The birds typically appear as dark silhouettes overhead and are tough to identify without an expert. Volunteers will help you distinguish species by size, shape and flight pattern. This is a fun way to collect volunteer hours! All the data is sent to the Hawk Migration Association of North America, a group that monitors population trends.

## Virginia Outdoors Festival – Oct. 8th

Banshee Reeks has been selected as the site of the [Virginia Outdoors Festival](#). The festival, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the [Virginia Outdoors Foundation](#) (VOF), will be held on October 8<sup>th</sup> and will feature some great activities including live music, guided tours, a fishing derby ...and food! VOF holds the easement to BRNP and many other fantastic properties. We're honored that Banshee Reeks was chosen as the site of this celebration out of the 750,000 acres of land that VOF holds.



Red-shouldered Hawk  
perched

You can find  
information about  
hawk-watch sites at:

<http://www.hmana.org/hawk-watch-sites/>

## Yard Maintenance for Fall

By Anne Owen

Here are some **quick tips**, be sure to read the full article on our [website](#)!



- Let leaves lie where they fall (or just blow them onto beds). Natural leaf litter provides shelter for many species and is a great natural mulch.
- Leave perennial stem and seed heads standing. Stems left this way can protect the plants themselves in severe weather by collecting insulating snow.
- If you do cut down perennials, consider leaving the cut stems in a loose stack on the ground to provide winter habitat.
- Include plants in your garden that look great in winter, such as coneflower, yarrow and native grasses and enjoy the artistry on frosty mornings when the leaves and seed heads are accented with halos of ice.



## What do YOU Know About American Chestnut Tree Restoration?

By Larry Johnson

Check out the full article on our [VMN website](#), AND find answers to the following:



**Question-** Is an American Chestnut tree growing on BRNP property?

**Question-** Does a wild (native survivor) American Chestnut tree exist in Loudoun County?

This past June 2016, I volunteered for a week-long annual inoculation project at The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) Research Farm through the Roads Scholar Program.

After a brief introductory session, the volunteers were turned over to the Research Farm's lead scientist, Dr. Laura Georgi. For the next five days Dr. Georgi instructed us on almost every aspect of the chestnut species. I learned first-hand how to identify the various symptoms of the blight's infections; developed a detailed understanding of the pathology of the fungus; and learned to differentiate taxonomically the hybridized tree generations produced in the backbreeding projects. Dr. Georgi provided a rudimentary introduction into the genetics of crossbreeding and techniques in germinating nuts to grow approximately 5000 seedlings per year.

Many are aware of the accidental introduction of the fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) that has devastated the American Chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*), the penultimate foundation species in the eastern North American forests (1-1.5 billion trees). In slightly over 50 years, the great American Chestnut was reduced to a few standing survivors. Less known is that although the fungus destroys the aboveground stems, it does not attack the root systems which are protected by

the soils; so that fortunately, the blight did not cause full extinction of *C. dentata*.

Recent research<sup>1</sup> estimates current population at roughly 431 million *C. dentata* stems (stem, sapling, or tree). This population equals less than 10% of pre-blight. That the vast majority (84%) of the stems inventoried are seedlings (< 2.5 cm dbh) illustrates the greatly diminished surviving stock.

[TACF](#) is one of the larger national restoration organizations. The TACF pursues the traditional inter/intra-breeding approaches to developing an immune hybrid tree that is 95% American. Their properties contain approximately 50,000 trees, sprouts, and seedlings. With only four staffed positions, the Meadowview backbreeding programs are highly dependent upon volunteers and citizen scientists.

With nine other Roads Scholars, we worked up to eight hours per day performing inoculations of over 2000 trees. Yes, we were intentionally infecting trees with the fungus! Of the 2000 trees we treated, the survival rate will probably be 5 or 6 trees. After limited early success, much progress is being achieved in producing a blight resistant tree, especially in the past 10 years. One can perceive within these efforts a change of attitude from one of dogged determination working against an overwhelming foe to one of confidence based on intelligent information. Conservation literature is beginning to address the pragmatic environmental impacts of repopulation dynamics of the Chestnut tree on the current forest biome.

Through this experience, I more fully comprehend the scope of the task of the TACF and related organizations. More importantly, I understand the vital importance of the role and the dedication of volunteers necessary to support the mission of restoring the mighty Chestnut tree.

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<sup>1</sup> Dalglish, H.J.; Nelson, C.D.; Scrivani, J.A.; Jacobs, D.F. *Consequences of Shifts in Abundance and Distribution of American Chestnut for Restoration of a Foundation Tree*. Reprinted from

Forests (ISSN 1999-4907) in *Chestnut, The Journal of The American Chestnut Foundation*, Issue 2, Vol. 30, Spring 2016.



## Adventures of a First Time Beekeeper: Parts 1 & 2

By Liz Dennison

We've excerpted very small sections of Liz's entertaining, enlightening and educational articles (lots of pics!) on her novice beekeeping experiences. Please be sure to take the time to check out the full versions on our website!

### [Part 1 - Getting Started](#)



We knew that pollinators need our support and that pollinators in turn support our local gardens, farms, vineyards, and orchards. We also knew that keeping two hives would allow us to put our 10 acres in land use and save on property taxes. We could sell our honey and look into other products like beeswax candles. But we didn't know anything about keeping bees. To get started we joined the [Loudoun Beekeepers Association](#). This wonderful organization meets on a wide variety of interesting topics from environmental concerns to how to keep bees in an urban setting.

.....The package arrived first and our mentor helped us move the bees into our hive. It was actually very easy. The bees moved right in and made themselves at home. When the nuc arrived several weeks later, we put the frames into the hive and those bees settled in as well. To give them a good start, we used a Boardman feeder to provide sugar water to both hives and treated them to avoid an infestation. With the bees safely in their hives, we were officially beekeepers.

### [Part 2 - Raising Bees](#)



What I found most interesting is that we can open the hives, pull individual frames, even remove an entire box and the bees pay no attention. They continue their work almost as if we're not there. We've never had to use our smoker and prefer not to use it. It's said that smoke calms the bees but the reality is that the bees perceive the smoke as a forest fire and focus on consuming their honey stores so they can carry it with them to safety. While there may be situations where smoke would be helpful, it seems counterproductive and unnecessary for routine hive care.

## Living Legacy Tree Planting, Nov 12

By Leslie Ashman

**Volunteers Needed -- Veterans & Families Welcome**

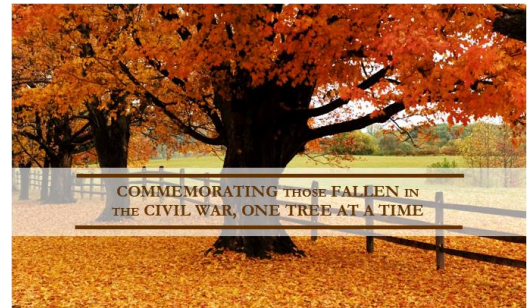


Photo by Kenneth Garrett. Copyright Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership

On Saturday, November 12, our VMN chapter is sponsoring a Living Legacy Tree planting at BRNP in partnership with the [Journey Through Hallowed Ground](#) (JTHG). We will be planting 100 seedlings (all NoVa natives) on a new path in the Preserve. The [Living Legacy project](#) commemorates the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War, with plans to plant a tree for each of the 620,000 soldiers who died in conflict. Trees will be assigned a soldier's name and their personal histories – as researched by JTHG volunteers and children around the country – will be posted to JTHG's website. A dedication ceremony is planned for Spring 2017.

We're proud to bring this living memorial to stand for generations to come at Banshee Reeks and to establish such a direct connection with JTHG. The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership is a non-profit, four-state partnership recognized by Congress as a National Heritage Area that is dedicated to raising awareness of the unparalleled American heritage in the region running from Gettysburg, PA, to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, VA.

We're looking for volunteers that day to assist with tree planting and logistics. Please register in advance at [Sign-Up Genius](#). Families are welcome to participate (children must be accompanied by an adult), and veterans are especially welcomed on this day after Veterans Day. The planting is scheduled for 9 am. Contact Leslie Ashman at [lashman1@verizon.net](mailto:lashman1@verizon.net) with any questions.



## Member Spotlight –Sheila Montalvan

### *1. Please tell us about your experience with the Virginia Master Naturalist Program.*

I believe it was the Spring of 2009 when I first read about the VMN program in a local newspaper. I was so glad for the opportunity to be part of the program and have learned so much from the awesome instructors. This was also my first introduction to Banshee Reeks, and I felt so fortunate that the training was held there and the opportunities to go exploring. And, although I have completed the formal training courses, I always look forward to the other learning sessions that are offered throughout the year.

I also look forward to achieving my volunteer hours. Since becoming a VMN, I have worked mostly with the Communications Committee, but have also worked with the Raptor Conservancy, native plant sales, Friends of Banshee Reeks and others.

### *2. What else can you share about yourself? Help us get to know you!*

I grew up in a tiny, rural town in central New York state, and a big part of my early life was spent outside with my family and friends. We had a large field with a garden in the summer, a creek filled with crayfish, a grand wooded area, and plenty of snow in the winter. My parents loved to camp, and every summer we would go on the road to some forest, lake, mountain, or ocean for a couple of weeks (or more). My parents also tolerated my “small pets” – which included many fish, newts, turtles, hermit crabs, gerbils, hamsters, and a couple of anoles named George and Martha who had free run of the living room window.

We moved to the Virginia suburbs when I was about ten, so I had a whole new environment to explore. I remember a science teacher about that time who had an enormous tank filled with fish he had caught locally. We were required to learn all their names and care for them. There was also an eel he had caught in the tank, and I have been fascinated with them ever since (but not to eat).



Sheila's home for 10 days on the Amazon

I also enjoy travelling and seeing what nature has to offer in other regions of the world. One of my solo adventure highlights was a trip on the Amazon River in Brazil. I met my travelling companions in Manaus, Brazil, and spent ten incredible days on the river. I was able to see pink dolphins, spider monkeys, howler monkeys, sloths, a harpy eagle and various other birds, piranhas, butterflies, insects, and an amazing variety of orchids, trees, and other plants. I came back a changed person, and all for the better.

I have also visited rain forests in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Washington state, and spent time at a wolf sanctuary in New Mexico. I've been fortunate to have travelled to several places, and always look for the nature side of things, even if it is a city. My husband is from Peru, and we have explored his native country as well as many other places in South America.

My husband Guillermo and I are fortunate to share our home with Sierra, a Black and Tan Coonhound.



Sheila in the Amazon!

### 3. What are your favorite aspects of VMN?

I feel I have always been a naturalist of sorts; I just never called myself one until VMN. I have always felt it was important to know the names of trees, flowers, rocks, birds, animals ... they are part of this place called Earth too, and are here for a reason. I took special effort to read and educate myself, and enjoyed most science classes in school and college. I had aspirations to become a marine biologist at one point, but decided that I most certainly am not a math or hard science person.

It's hard to state a favorite or specific area of interest; I truly enjoy all aspects of the natural world. To me, a rock is not boring, nor is a snake scary. I have deep respect for an old tree, a wildflower, a weird looking insect and even fragrant New York state soil.

### 4. Feel free to philosophize about a favorite aspect of being a naturalist if you like.

My favorite part of being a Master Naturalist is the field experiences. I have had so many great learning experiences while out and about with knowledgeable people. Whether exploring the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Leadership, Balls Bluff, Banshee Reeks, or any of the other outdoor places in Loudoun County, I always manage to see something remarkable.

I am also glad to have a creative outlet by working with the Communications Committee on our newsletter, *Bug Bytes*.

*Thank you, for telling us more about yourself and for all of the work you do for VMN!*

Check out Sheila's review on the fascinating book, *Feathers, the Evolution of a Natural Miracle* by Thor Hanson on our [website](#).



**An excerpt:** This insightful, easy to read book is consistent with Dr. Hanson's engaging style and enthusiasm for the subject. *Feathers* contains a variety of biological, cultural, scientific, and religious information that would appeal to most readers. Any naturalist or bird watcher would benefit from reading this book, and you won't want to miss a single part.

## Stewardship: Where Caring Takes Action

By Leslie Ashman



*It's always therapeutic for me to return to my birthplace in Upstate NY where my love of nature – and the seeds of stewardship – were sewn. Indian Kill Nature Preserve Glenville NY 2015*

"I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can." (John Muir, 1896) <sup>1</sup>

In this, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service, it feels appropriate to quote one of its earliest advocates.<sup>2</sup> And this quote feels particularly poignant as I've been ruminating on our collective human relationship with Nature, what it means to steward, and the emotional connection that drives us to do so.

In our Interpretation class, we were taught the process that takes us from Awareness through Understanding and Caring ultimately leading to Stewardship, and that, according to Freeman Tilden, "Any interpretation that does not somehow relate... to something within the personality or experience... will be sterile," that is – in order to garner action and commitment, we need to reach beyond the intellectual to connect with people emotionally. Otherwise, the message is ineffective in soliciting active response.

I would submit that even the Education and Citizen Science pillars of the Naturalist program are in themselves forms of Stewardship (our third pillar), for whether we're birders, beekeepers, goat-tenders, tree-huggers or inveterate counters of the creepy-crawlers, we're *in action* because we *care for* various aspects of Nature. We have learned that that the warp and weft of Nature weaves an integrated whole that includes us as its participants *and* its stewards.



More and more, I'm looking at my own stewardship endeavors as finding ways to connect others with the *personal experience* of Nature. Getting children, family and friends outdoors to see how they can touch and are in return touched by their surroundings. Drawing parallels between the new and captivating perception with the old, known and familiar; and expressing those perceptions in terms of how they make us feel and memories they evoke. By sharing a personal story; others will listen and be inspired. It wasn't until I realized that the [Dutchman's Breeches](#) I was introduced to in Botany class reminded me of Dutch dolls I had as a child and walks in a nearby [Nature Preserve](#) with my mother back then, that I understood so clearly why those flowers instantly made me smile and want to plant my own next Spring. Stewardship might work through our words and our hands, but it comes from the heart. This Autumn, think about ways to share those connections, memories and experiences as ways of offering the gift of Stewardship – and the wonders of Nature — to others.

1 <https://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/FoundationsCurriculum.pdf>

2 <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/people/historical/muir/>



Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)  
photo by Allison G.

## COMMITTEE CORNER

### Volunteer Service Projects Committee

*Chair: Britta Hart*

Our members have logged many volunteer hours this year. Don't forget to log those hours! Also, take a stroll down the projects list and see what's new. Remember to log travel time separately from the project you are working on!

### Historian Committee

*Chair: Suzanne DeSaix*

The Historian Committee is looking for a new chairperson. This committee is essential to maintaining the historical record of our chapter, primarily through photos of social events and the great volunteer work performed, but also to maintain an archive of key chapter records. A project to create a digital version of our scrapbook was recently begun and would benefit from the attention of a dedicated (and much appreciated!) volunteer.

In the meantime, please be sure to send photos of your volunteer activities to Suzanne DeSaix at [sumatkai@yahoo.com](mailto:sumatkai@yahoo.com).

### Communications/Newsletter Committee

*Chair: Bryan Henson*

We hope that you're enjoying our new and improved website, [www.bansheereeks.org](http://www.bansheereeks.org). This past quarter, we've re-invigorated our [VMN-Banshee Reeks Chapter Facebook group](#). If you haven't yet joined, please do! We're seeing some great pictures and articles posted to keep you up-to-date on volunteer and members' outdoor activities, BRNP goings-on and general natural science news. We're always looking for article contributions to the website, so *remember that writing and research time count as VMN Volunteer Hours!*

### Outreach Committee

*Chair: Leslie Ashman*

The Outreach Committee is busy this season staffing booths and developing new ways to promote our chapter and the great work that we do. We've re-invigorated our relationship with Loudoun Environmental Stewardship Alliance (LESA) and are looking forward to presenting VMN to the crowds at Nature Stewardship Day. Event attendees are happy to hear about the program and upcoming volunteer opportunities. We're always looking for help; please contact me at [lashman1@verizon.net](mailto:lashman1@verizon.net) if you're interested!

## Host Committee

Mark your calendars for the 2016 Annual Chapter Meeting on Thursday, November 10th! Light snacks and socializing begin at 6:30pm, followed by the meeting at 7:00. We will elect new officers and board members, get updated on chapter business and enjoy a lighthearted lecture by guest speaker, Ron Circé, about Naturalist Gear! Earn a combination of volunteer hours (Meeting & Elections) and CE (Naturalist Gear)!

Do you hear holiday bells ringing? December Holiday Party venue options are now being considered! If you wish to Host this year's Holiday Party in December or can suggest modestly-priced venue rental options, please contact Debbie Crew at [debcrew@comcast.net](mailto:debcrew@comcast.net). We welcome all helping hands to join in on the jingle party fun!

## Membership Committee

*Chair: Frank McLaughlin*

Our new class got off to a good start on September 17, 2016. We have twenty-two new students...a full class. The Membership Committee activity has been real quiet since the 17<sup>th</sup>. Lisa Malone became certified, so if you see her please give her your congratulations!

## Continuing Education Committee

*Chair: Bill Cour*

The Continuing Education (CE) Committee works to identify and provide opportunities for chapter members to earn the CE hours they need to achieve/maintain certification. In addition to classes that the chapter itself offers, we post listings of CE opportunities with other chapters and with organizations such as Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the Audubon Naturalist Society, the Virginia Native Plant Society, etc. If you have a class that you would like to offer for the chapter, or you see an event that you think would be a CE opportunity, or there is a topic on which you would really like the chapter to present a class, contact Bill Cour ([wmkcour@gmail.com](mailto:wmkcour@gmail.com)) or Ron ([ron.circe@loudoun.gov](mailto:ron.circe@loudoun.gov)).

## Training Committee

*Co-Chairs: Alysoun Mahoney and Sue Robinson*

2016-17 Orientation class started successfully on Sept 17 for a new larger class of 22 students. The committee is now re-working the midterm tests for Dec. All speakers and materials are in place. Several classes still having an opening for Class Assistants; if anyone is interested in volunteering, please contact Kara Pascale at [kara.pascale@gmail.com](mailto:kara.pascale@gmail.com).

## About Banshee Reeks VMN

The Banshee Reeks chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist program is a volunteer corps focused on education, outreach, conservation, and management of the natural resources in Virginia. The chapter was founded in 2006 and focuses on Loudoun County and hosts many events at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. We are always looking for new members and like-minded organizations.

Visit our website <http://www.vmnbancheereeks.org/> or email us at [vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com](mailto:vmnbansheereeks@gmail.com).

And join our Facebook group:

[Virginia Master Naturalist-Banshee Reeks Chapter](#)

## On your own:

*Submitted by Leslie Ashman*

Disappointingly, I just learned that the length and position of the rust color on the Woolly Bear Caterpillar's (*Pyrrharctia isabella*) coat does **not** predict the mildness or severity of the coming winter. While Dr. Howard Curran's widely publicized study concluded on some very specific correlations, according to the [National Weather Service](#), the caterpillar's coloring is "based on how long the caterpillar has been feeding, its age and species". But who knows? Maybe you can test his theory out on your own this season. Look for them mid-October and learn about their hibernation cycle and natural antifreeze, glycerol, on the NWS site.



*Photos of Woolly Bear Caterpillar and Isabella Tiger Moth from National Weather Service*